



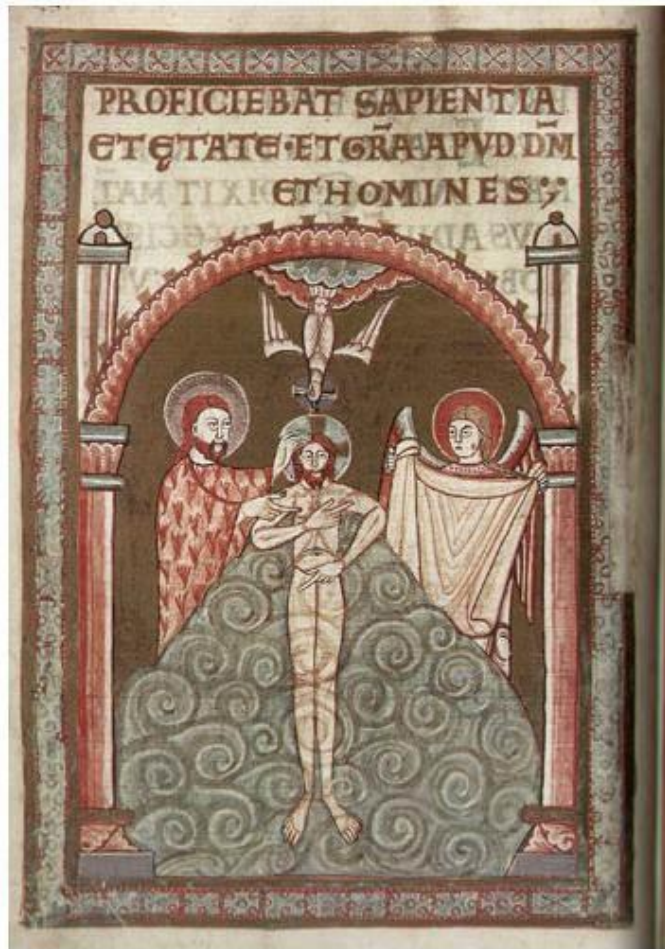
Catholic Faith, Life & Creed

Doctrinal Catechesis Sessions for adults based on
the Church Year, the Liturgy, & the Sunday Scriptures

Breaking Open the Word

by Mary Birmingham

Second Sunday of Ordinary Time A



Jesus' Baptism by John the Baptist
One page from Gold Codex of [Gniezno](#), artwork from end of 11th century.



Begin with the Sign of the Cross

In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Opening Prayer

Option 1. Use Opening Prayer from the Sunday Liturgy.

Option 2.

God of My Life

Only in love can I find you, my God.

In love the gates of my soul spring open,
allowing me to breathe a new air of freedom
and forget my own petty self.

In love my whole being streams forth
out of the rigid confines of narrowness and anxious self-assertion,
which makes me a prisoner of my own poverty and emptiness.
In love all the powers of my soul flow out toward you,
wanting never more to return,
but to lose themselves completely in you,
since by your love you are the inmost center of my heart,
closer to me than I am to myself.

But when I love you,
when I manage to break out of the narrow circle of self
and leave behind the restless agony of unanswered questions,
when my blinded eyes no longer look merely from afar
and from the outside upon your unapproachable brightness,
and much more when you yourself, O Incomprehensible One,
have become through love the inmost center of my life,
then I can bury myself entirely in you, O mysterious God,
and with myself all my questions. [Karl Rahner, SJ] ¹

Catholic
**Faith, Life
& Creed**
Version 2.0

© Mary Birmingham,
2011. All rights reserved.

Breaking Open the
Word worksheets
connect with *Catholic
Faith, Life, & Creed*
Doctrinal Sessions.

Editor: Bill Huebsch

Published cooperatively by
TeamRCIA.com and
PastoralPlanning.com.

¹ Shrine of St. Elizabeth Ann Seton at Church of our Lady of the Rosary.

Liturgical Context

- ▶ We now embark upon the season of Ordinary time in Cycle A.
- ▶ The readings focus on last things, eternity and end times--that is--they are eschatological in focus.
- ▶ At the end of each liturgical year we focus our attention on the end of Jesus' ministry. At the beginning of each cycle we focus on the early days of his mission.
- ▶ John the Baptist witnesses to Christ. He names him as God's Son—the long-awaited, Chosen One of Israel.
- ▶ The Second Sunday of Ordinary Time is privileged each year to play host to John the evangelist rather than Matthew, Mark or Luke. Next week Matthew's version of events will begin. Today, however, we hear from John.
- ▶ John's Gospel is used each year on this Second Sunday of Ordinary Time in order to place the events proclaimed in close proximity to Epiphany—a celebration of God's manifestation.
- ▶ The verses chosen from the prophet Isaiah are significant. John the Baptist hearkens back to the Servant Songs and the Suffering Servant whose mission comes to fulfillment in the person of Jesus. John heralds that fulfillment.
- ▶ God's Spirit made it possible for John to be converted to Christ and recognize him as God's Chosen One. We too are converted to Christ as our Lord and Savior by that same Spirit.

Catechist invites participants to respond to the following questions in groups of two, then surface insights in the wider group.

- ▶ What spoke to your heart in today's liturgy?
- ▶ What reading, symbol, music, homily, spoke to you and why did it speak to you?
- ▶ What touched you the most in today's Gospel?

If time is a consideration, omit reflection on one or both of the readings. (You may want to concentrate on the Gospel alone.)

First reading: Isaiah 49, 3. 5-6

- ▶ It is important to understand the Servant Songs of Isaiah if we are to understand how early Christians associated the Servant in those songs with Christ.
- ▶ Contained within the Servant Songs are four poems. Scholarship still debates the identity of the Servant. Sometimes it appears as though God is the Servant and at other times it would seem that it is Israel.
- ▶ The mission of the servant is to gather the people and to save and bring judgment upon the world.
- ▶ The Servant suffers and dies a violent, shameful death. The meaning of his death is understood as vicarious atonement. He is later vindicated by his resurrection.
- ▶ It is no wonder that Christians believed Jesus to be the fulfillment of Isaiah's prophecy.
- ▶ The Servant's life is given as a sin offering. People experience healing as a result of the pain and suffering he endured. The Servant's death releases people from bondage and oppression.

- ▶ Early Christianity believed it needed no other proof that Christ was who they said he was.
- ▶ The mission of Christ and the mission of the Suffering Servant were synonymous.
- ▶ When the people were released from Babylonian captivity and the people of God were restored as a nation, Christians believed that restoration to foreshadow the restoration and forgiveness of Christ.
- ▶ The pericope chosen for today's liturgy comes from Isaiah's second poem.
- ▶ The mysterious Servant of Isaiah's prophecy will one day bring God's people together; he will restore and bring salvation to the entire world.
- ▶ Christianity believed that Jesus was indeed the Servant that Israel had been waiting for; he was the Messiah that had been foretold.
- ▶ His saving death united the whole world; his mission was universal—it extended to all of the nations.



Mystagogy

reflection on the mysteries

Catechist invites participants to respond to the following questions in groups of two, then surface brief insights in the wider group.

- ▶ What is the lesson in this reading? How could this possibly be a word for us today?
- ▶ When there are so many indicators that Christ is the long awaited Messiah, why or how do you suppose that those who should have recognized him did not? What is the lesson in that for us?
- ▶ In what way, if any, has God saved you?

Second Reading: 1 Corinthians 1, 1-3

- ▶ Paul's refers to himself as the one God called to be an apostle.
- ▶ He reminds the Corinthian community that Christ sanctified them and called them to sainthood.
- ▶ Paul's message reminds the Corinthians of their higher purpose. They are part of the universal Church of God at Corinth.
- ▶ The Corinthian community, much like many modern counterpart communities, was often embroiled in controversies and petty self-serving problems and issues.
- ▶ The Corinthian community isolated itself and cut itself off from the other communities. Their only concern was their own petty, individual concerns.
- ▶ They failed to see that they were part of something far more wondrous and universal than they could conceive.
- ▶ They were part of the People of God gathered and called together by Christ himself.



Mystagogy

reflection on the mysteries

Catechist invites participants to respond to the following questions in groups of two, surface brief insights in wider group.

- ▶ What happens when communities fail to see themselves as part of a wider reality? (For example, what happens when the United States fails to see that it is part of the global village?) Why is such isolation harmful? What can it bring about? What is the lesson for us today?
- ▶ Why was Paul so insistent that the Corinthians see the wider picture?
- ▶ Why is it important for us to see ourselves as part of something larger than our own parish family?

Gospel: John 1, 29-34

Read or summarize the Gospel, perhaps provide a copy of the text for further reflection.

Gospel Exegesis

Please note: catechist may intersperse the questions at the end of the exegesis throughout your presentation where appropriate.) Catechist invites participants to respond to the following questions before presenting the exegesis.

- ▶ What specifically touched you in this Gospel?
- ▶ What does this Gospel mean to you?
- ▶ John does not relate the actual baptism of Jesus probably in response to those who were followers of the Baptist and who believed he, not Jesus, was the Chosen One of Israel.
- ▶ John the evangelist would have avoided making Jesus look subordinate to John the Baptist by having John baptize him.
- ▶ The evangelist has John the Baptist himself declaring the identity of Christ and his own subordination to Jesus.
- ▶ This is the moment of John's conversion. He was promised that God would reveal the identity of the Messiah. God indeed kept his promise and Jesus was revealed as the Chosen One of Israel.
- ▶ The dove resting upon Jesus was God's sign.
- ▶ Now John knew definitively that he was called to testify to the Light of the World—the Light who illumined his own darkness. Now John could fully embrace the role God sent him to fulfill—that of precursor.
- ▶ John's conversion demonstrates the path of conversion for most believers—the slow unfolding of awareness of who Christ is and what he came to accomplish.
- ▶ John's conversion is in direct contrast with the whiplash conversion of Paul on the road to Damascus.
- ▶ Life is a constant journey of awakenings to the Light. We will never fully

- plumb the depths of Christ's mystery, but our conversion will continue to grow in us until the end of our days.
- ▶ John uses signs, imagery and symbolism to relate the events of the Gospel.
 - ▶ Jesus was coming toward John the Baptist in the Gospel. His use of the word "coming" is significant. It bespeaks a Christology—Jesus Christ is the "One Who Is to Come." He is the long-awaited Messiah; he existed *before* John the Baptist.
 - ▶ When the evangelist used the phrase, "it is he" it is evocative of Moses and the burning bush and the voice of God saying, "I AM."
 - ▶ A theology of Christ is found simply by interpreting the use of words and phrases in the Johannine text.
 - ▶ Jesus is the Son of God; Jesus is the Messiah foretold by the prophets; Jesus is the voice in Moses' burning bush—IT IS HE. He is God.
 - ▶ The Baptist must now take a back stage to Jesus so the Christ can take front and center stage.
 - ▶ John pointed to the key protagonist in God's unfolding plan of salvation—he pointed to the Christ.
 - ▶ John now understands that his baptism in water, the hallmark of his ministry, was simply preparation for the baptism by fire and the Spirit that Christ would bring.
 - ▶ As stated, John is the Gospel of symbols. We learn much from his symbolism.
- ▶ **Layers of meaning in the DOVE**
 - ▶ The dove evokes the power of God's Spirit who hovered over the waters of creation.
 - ▶ The Spirit strengthens Isaiah's Servant for the mission he was sent to accomplish.
 - ▶ The Spirit opens John the Baptist's eyes to the reality of who Christ is and what he came to accomplish.
 - ▶ The Spirit will be sent by Christ to continue his saving mission in the world.
 - ▶ The evangelist's primary concern is to illustrate that Jesus Christ is indeed the Chosen One that was sent by God and who was foretold by the prophets to save the world.
- ▶ **Layers of meaning in the title Lamb of God:**
 - ▶ "Lamb of God" would have evoked images of rams going before the ewes in order to protect the flock.
 - ▶ Many would have associated the term with the eschatological belief in the Old Testament in which it was believed that the "ram of God," a warrior-like God, would emerge on the apocalyptic day of the Lord in order to free the people.
 - ▶ There was a similar belief in Qumran of a warrior lamb, taken from the flock to protect it against its enemies.
 - ▶ Echoes of the Abraham and Isaac saga can be heard in the term: a ram was substituted for Isaac's life on Abraham's altar of sacrifice.
 - ▶ We hear in the Servant Songs that the Servant was a "lamb led to slaughter".

- ▶ One cannot miss the association with the Paschal Lamb of Passover whose blood was shed in atonement for sin.
- ▶ The Paschal Lamb also conjures images of the great liberation from slavery in Egypt.
- ▶ We hear in the Book of Revelation that Jesus was the lamb who was slain—whose blood The evangelist’s clever use of the literary images of Dove and Lamb of God posits a Christology that bespeaks the mission of the Christ.
- ▶ John the Baptist proclaims the truth of who Christ is and what he came to accomplish.
- ▶ Naming Jesus the “Lamb of God” spoke volumes to the intended audience.
- ▶ Jesus truly is God’s Lamb who takes away the sins of the world, who atones for the sins of humanity by his sacrificial death, who truly is the Suffering Servant of Isaiah and the long-awaited Messiah.
- ▶ At the outset of Jesus’ ministry we are given a glimpse of the fullness and the theology that drives his mission and where it will lead—to the cross.
- ▶ John the evangelist has the Baptist himself express a theology of Christ’s baptism.
- ▶ We are given a foreshadowing of the paschal event that will culminate Jesus’ ministry—a paschal event in which we are all invited to share.



Mystagogy

reflection on the mysteries

Catechist invites participants to respond to the following questions in small groups of four. Use the last three or four minutes to surface the insights in the wider group. Catechist begins by sharing story from his or her life. See appendix #3 for an example.

- ▶ What is the primary message of this Gospel?
- ▶ Does John’s slow coming to consciousness regarding who Jesus is in any way resonate with your own experience of coming to deeper conversion to Jesus?
- ▶ Jesus is the Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world...What does that term mean to you?
- ▶ How has Jesus been your Savior and Messiah? How has he liberated you?
- ▶ In what way have you grown in awareness of the sacrifice Jesus made for you as one of his followers?
- ▶ What does it mean to you that you are invited to share Jesus’ own paschal journey—in other words—in what way might God be calling you to die and rise again for the sake of the kingdom? Are you willing to say “yes” to God’s call? What obstacles stand in your way?
- ▶ What does it mean to you that you are (or will be) baptized into the healing, preaching and liberating mission of Christ? In what way might you be called to heal, preach and liberate others?

Concluding Prayer

Repeat OPENING PRAYER for this session OR

Minor rite: Blessing: 95-97

Appendix

1. God has saved me in so many ways. God has helped me control my unbridled anger over the disease of mental illness. God has kept our family intact in dealing with it. God has invited me into intimate relationship with him—he has invited me to enter into communion with the Spirit who dwells within me. He has shown me what it means to participation in the divine life that Paul insisted was present in our hearts. God continually brings me back from the brink of doubt into the light of faith. God has indeed saved me—again and again he saves me.

2. My faith in Christ has grown over the many years of my faith journey. There are times I think I am nothing more than a babe feasting on pabulum. There are other times when I feel a depth and a maturity that only Christ himself could give. True conversion calls for trust that God will act. John the Baptist was constantly asking God to reveal the identity of the Chosen One of Israel—the Christ. I am always asking God to reveal Christ's action in the events of my life. Sometimes I am able to firmly point to a situation and say, "See, there he is; he is actively engaged in this event." Other times it is more elusive.

This past week, on the brink of despair over the continuous situation of dealing with our mentally ill child, I turned to our pastor for prayer and guidance. I confessed that I am at the steeped in despair—hope is elusive. I told him that I do not see God's guidance or help in dealing with this issue. I prayed that God lead me in the right path to do what is best for my child. For the many hundreds of time in twelve years, I once again turned him over to God's care. Two days later God acted. We were able to find a reasonable place for him to live, to help him try to forge a life for himself and to allow us to help him from a distance. I sit here in awe at the quick response to so urgent a prayer.

Scripture reveals that John experienced doubt. I have experienced a great deal of doubt myself. God is, however, an eleventh hour God in my life. When I am at the end, God acts. God wants me to know unequivocally that it is God's action--not my own--that brings peace and resolution. God uses such events to strengthen my faith. Sometimes I take ten steps forward only to later take five steps back. Life is a series of conversion awakenings. I trust God will never forsake me and will always try to get my attention so I can recognize him in the events of my life.



Connecting Liturgy with Catholic Doctrine

Possible doctrinal themes that flow from this week's
Liturgy of the Word and Eucharist

Liturgical Year
Jesus Christ
Church and Ecclesiology

Baptism
Sacraments
Creed

Other themes may be chosen as well--choose from the scope and sequence chart and create your own connecting statement. The following statements make the appropriate connections between the doctrinal issue you have chosen and the liturgy of the day.

LITURGICAL YEAR

Today is the Second Sunday in Ordinary Time, a most appropriate time to address what we celebrate in the unfolding liturgical cycle. The entire mystery of Christ from his incarnation, life, death, resurrection, ascension to the Father and the sending of the Holy Spirit is manifested in one complete liturgical year. It is thus most appropriate as the early days of the new liturgical year begin that we address what the Church teaches about the LITURGICAL YEAR.

JESUS CHRIST

Today's reading from Isaiah speaks of a future Servant who would one day bring God's people together in harmony. This Servant would usher in God's salvation. John the Baptist comes to slow recognition that Jesus is the Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world. Today's feast is a Christological feast par excellence. It is most fitting that today's extended session focuses on the person of JESUS CHRIST.

CHURCH AND ECCLESIOLOGY

Paul's letter to the Corinthians reminds his community that they are part of a church that extended beyond their borders. They were so concerned with their own issues they failed to see the wider picture. They isolated themselves from all the other Christian communities. They failed to understand their own sense of church and the ecclesiology (theology of church that defined their existence. It is thus important for us to understand our own ecclesiology when it comes to how we understand Church. Thus today's doctrinal session will focus on CHURCH AND ECCLESIOLOGY.

BAPTISM

John was baptizing the people. He saw Jesus approach and recognized him as God's Son. The baptism we experience incorporates us into the life, death and resurrection of God's Son. Drawing from the baptism of Jesus last week and the baptism John was performing for the forgiveness of sins, it is most appropriate that we focus our doctrinal session on the SACRAMENT OF BAPTISM.

SACRAMENTS

Sacraments continue Christ's saving mission in our day and our time. We are given access to his ministry that is in its beginning phases in these early days of the new liturgical year. It is thus most appropriate that we focus our attention today on what the Church teaches about sacraments—the celebrations/rituals that bring the healing, reconciling, saving mission of Christ into our midst—that make present the Paschal Mystery of Christ—his life, passion, death, resurrection and the sending of the Holy Spirit. Thus today our doctrinal session will focus on what the Church teaches about SACRAMENTS.

CREED

In these early days of Jesus ministry as Christ begins the daunting task of establishing the final, eschatological age, the kingdom of God, it is most fitting we recommit to what we profess about Christ as Christians. What we profess is embodied in the Creed we proclaim at every Sunday Eucharistic liturgy. It is thus most appropriate that we focus our attention on the CREED.

SCRIPTURE AND REVELATION I or II

On this day in which Isaiah speaks of the future Suffering Servant and John the Baptist heralds Christ as the Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world—as God's beloved Son--we witness face to face God's divine revelation. God continues to reveal himself to us through Divine Revelation, the Word of God. It is most fitting that our doctrinal session today will address SCRIPTURE AND REVELATION I or II.